

Joel 3:17-21

Waiting to be Satisfied

Turmoil would be an understatement to describe the world's experience in the last two years. The pandemic has and continues to destabilize people personally and countries nationally and internationally. Markets fluctuate based on government restrictions, travel plans are tenuous at best and disrupted, interrupted, delayed or cancelled at worst. Our hope that just maybe things were looking up have come crashing down in the last few days with announcements of restrictions coming to sporting events and large venues, travel, and in this last week of school before Christmas break, many children are bringing home all their belongings in case things switch to virtual classes in January.

To make matters more difficult for so many has been fire, drought, flooding, storms, tornadoes, and more as the climate destabilizes. In Kentucky last week as the tornadoes decimated entire communities and in the last weeks when BC dealt with massive flooding and slides, the realities hit home that we cannot control everything about our lives. Catastrophic events can and do happen to anyone regardless of how one lives their lives or conducts themselves.

Then there are personal tragedies of loss that hamper our ability to live our lives on our terms whether it be illness, loss of employment or status, loss of loved ones, abuse by people or of substances, or loss of our own mobility.

The book of Joel is written to those who have experienced great loss. In this story of catastrophe wave after wave of locusts have destroyed everything in their wake. Now, one must be careful when interpreting these types of texts. Many times, Christians have said things that infer that catastrophe happens when people are deep in sin and it is God's way of bringing about repentance and change.

I hesitate to go there, weather is weather, and what we are doing to our earth has a whole lot to do with us rather than what God may or may not be up to. Nature too has cycles and rhythms and to read more into these events than they are...just natural disasters...would be trying to read the mind of God.

When we experience hardship, illness, and circumstances beyond our control, there are no easy answers for why things happen, and to blame God takes away from the fact that this world is a place of beauty and of brokenness. That is how it is it. Do our actions factor into many things? That is for sure, but not all things are in our control nor is God to blame.

What Joel teaches us is that in times of disaster, whether natural or man made, coming together in worship and in community is a way to make us aware that even when all

things are out of control God is present to and for us. It doesn't take us out of our circumstances, but does give us an anchor, a place where our hearts can be sure that no matter the outcome. God goes with us and is with us in the messiness, the chaos, and the dark places.

Still, that does not take away our responsibility for doing the work of restoration. Scientists, doctors, health care providers, teachers, carpenters, electricians, geologists, truck drivers, construction crews, psychologists, cooks, ministers, artists, musicians, crafters, law enforcement, each has a place in the restoration of relationships and community. What is provided to us through scripture is an example of what is important and how we might do this work in ways that are compassionate, just, and grace-filled, even imaginative.

When looking at a book like Joel, we are reminded that this particular writing comes before the birth of the one who we now understand and trust to be the Word of God made flesh, God incarnate, God with us in the child born as Jesus.

The people of Joel's time in Jerusalem had experienced much destruction and devastation. The writing is thought to be from the time when the people who had been in exile had returned to their homeland and things were not as good as they had hoped for upon taking possession of their land again. Nature was still nature, people and countries still warring and clashing. They thought that when they returned home they would be satisfied and yet they were still waiting, waiting for things to return to normal. But life is never normal. We get through one thing to be faced with another. We are always waiting to be satisfied.

In order to feel satisfied we use our purchasing power to consume products, food, entertainment. We work thinking that our purpose is to have enough stuff, enough prestige, power or money. We find leaders around the globe who desire power to the degree that nothing else matters but that they can control everything even to the clothing that is worn, or who is or is not able to worship, work, or move about the land freely. And then a pandemic hits and every life is impacted. In another instant flooding happens taking out roadways, and products from food to gas cannot get to those who need it. A tornado rips your house from its foundations and you are lucky to get out with your life and that of those you love. Cancer strikes and you can't catch your breath.

And Joel's response is God is with us. God's response in Jesus is God is with us. In our time the Holy Spirit is God with us. This is not a plan for getting us out of our mess, but rather a guarantee that because of Jesus we are not alone. That when we lay in a hospital bed in a room by ourselves, feeling isolated and overwhelmed, when the bank account is dry, when grocery store shelves are empty, when your farm has been devastated by flood and animal lives lost, when you have to flee because of nature or manmade horror, even when you are just lonely, God has not abandoned us or our world.

It is in these moments that we listen for God in our hearts and minds, and in the words and actions of others coming alongside us. We will never find satisfaction in this world alone. Our satisfaction comes in the relationships we build no matter where we are, with Christ's love, hope, joy, and peace filling us up regardless of the circumstances we face. This is not fanciful thinking or positive thinking; it is so much more than that. It is based in the lived experience of God's people for millennia. It is about knowing God moving and working in the world as powerfully as ever and that this world does not have the last word – God does!

Because of Christ we know that God's love is the final judgement, the final word for us and for all creation. As we move into Christmas and into a New Year with all of its uncertainty know that our wait is over. God has spoken in Christ, given us community in the church, and given us work to do that will provide the satisfaction of meaning and purpose in our lives. And we do it all, all this living, all this relationship building, in the community of the church, amongst one another.

Through Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit we go each day to love and serve the Lord. Amen.